



## **Frequently Asked Questions About Virginia's Education Reforms**

### **How much time has been allowed for local school divisions to incorporate the new Standards of Learning before testing students on them?**

The new SOLs were adopted in June of 1995 and local school divisions have been encouraged to incorporate them ever since. The majority of school systems aligned their curricula with the new SOLs within the first two years.

In November 1996, local school divisions were sent test blueprints which outlined the content that was going to be tested on the SOL tests. Eight regional informational meetings were held for local educators during the fall of 1997 in order to review the SOL testing structure and relationship to the standards in each reporting category.

The SOL tests were given for the first time in the spring of 1998, three years after the SOLs were first adopted by the state Board of Education and 18 months after test blueprints were sent to local school divisions.

The requirement for students to pass SOL tests in order to earn a Standard or Advanced Studies diploma will not apply to students until the Class of 2004.

### **What resources is the Commonwealth going to provide to support the school divisions in the implementation of the SOLs and SOA?**

Several areas of funding and other support are being provided to the schools:

During the fiscal year 1997-1998, \$6.2 million was provided as an incentive payment to purchase teaching materials to address the SOLs.

In the Spring of 1997, \$55 million was provided to support classroom technology. \$26,300 was provided for every school.

Graphing calculators, scientific probes, and sensing device kits were purchased and distributed to local school divisions in support of the SOLs in Mathematics and Science. The total purchase was \$20 million.

Teacher training funds to support instruction in the SOLs, as well as professional development funds for principal and superintendent training, are being made available on an application basis. A total of \$25.1 million is being provided over the 1998-2000 biennium.

Remediation funds, which provide for additional hours of instruction and teacher training on remediation techniques, are committed for fiscal year 1999 at \$14.3 million and for fiscal year 2000 at \$15.3 million. These funds will support students who require remediation based on performance on the SOL tests.

Diagnosis of reading problems in kindergarten and first-grade students, combined with the provision of intervention services statewide, has been supported through the Early Intervention Reading Initiative (EIR). In the 1997-98 fiscal year \$6.6 million was allocated among 117 school divisions to support the EIR. \$6.7 million has been appropriated for the initiative for the 1998-2000 biennium.



Every parent and student received a copy of the SOLs in December 1997.

The Department of Education will prepare, print, and send the School Performance Report Card to individual public schools for mailing to parents.

The Department of Education will provide direct technical assistance, sample materials, and workshops and conferences to help local school divisions achieve these standards. Three regional Best Practices Centers have been established to increase accessibility to resources and to facilitate information sharing among school divisions.

The Board of Education is committed to providing assistance to schools to help their students achieve the SOLs objectives.

**Kirk T. Schroder, president of the Board, has stated: “We as a board are going to do everything we can in working with the education community to give schools the tools...they need to raise performance. It’s an important responsibility that we take seriously.”**

### **Why are the SOL tests given before the end of the school year and before courses are completed?**

Currently the time of testing must permit scores to be provided to schools before closing because: (1) the Standards of Accreditation (SOA) require that they be considered in promotion and retention decisions in grades 3, 5, and 8; and (2) the SOA call for the passing of certain high school tests to earn verified credits which are part of graduation requirements. In addition, remediation and summer review of the curriculum changes prior to the school year are based on testing data. Adequate time must be allowed for scanning and scoring of the tests, printing of reports and supportive materials, and shipment. The Superintendent of Public Instruction convened a committee of division superintendents to advise the Department on the timing of the test administration. The Department is also working with the testing contractor to reduce the time required for scoring the SOL tests.

### **Since the test items change, how can teachers have an indication of what content to cover?**

A test blueprint based in the SOLs has been developed for each SOL test. The test blueprints are the guidelines for test construction and use, and they serve as the foundation for the score reports associated with each test. A blueprint displays the number of test items which will be assigned to each reporting category, such as “computation and estimation in Grade 8 Mathematics” for the life of the test. Blueprints were distributed to all school systems in late 1997 and are available on the Department of Education’s web page.

### **How is the specific testing time period for schools selected?**

Each school division has the opportunity to arrange the scheduling of tests within a “window” of time determined with the Department of Education. Three weeks have been allotted for the actual testing time frame. The Department is continuing to review the scheduling of SOL test administrations to provide the maximum instructional time possible prior to testing.



**What about special accommodations for students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency?**

Students with disabilities who are part of the SOL testing program as specified in their Individualized Education Programs or 504 plans may take the tests with accommodations as outlined in those plans. Accommodations that are permitted address the timing and scheduling of tests, the adaptation of the test settings, presentations of test items, and the method of response. For example, a test may be read to a student; multiple test sessions are allowed; and communication boards may be used.

A student with limited English proficiency may be exempted from the SOL tests in grades 3, 5, or 8, for one time only. Accommodations for testing, such as having the questions read and giving additional time, are available for such students, according to guidelines provided to the school divisions. There are no plans to develop separate assessments for students with limited English proficiency.

**When is the first year that certain high school course SOL tests count towards graduation requirements?**

The Class of 2004 (the ninth grade class of school year 2000-2001) will be the first high school students who will need to pass certain high school course tests, and subsequently earn verified units of credit, in order to graduate with a diploma. For the Standard diploma, six verified units of credit must be earned. Nine verified units of credit must be earned for the Advanced Studies diploma.

**When will school accreditation ratings based on the percentage of students passing SOL tests begin?**

A school's accreditation rating for 1999-2000 will be based on the percentage of students passing the SOL test in school year 1998-1999. At that time, a school will be "Fully Accredited" if 70 percent of its students pass the SOL tests (with the exception of 50 percent in History and Social Science and Science in the Grade 3). The school will be "Provisionally Accredited" if less than 70

percent of its students pass the tests but improvement has occurred from 1998. A school that shows no improvement or drops in passing rates from 1998 will be "Accredited with Warning." No school, however, can lose its accreditation until the 2006-07 school year.

**What happens if a school cannot achieve the Standards of Accreditation objectives? Will the school lose state funding?**

Consequences affecting a school which has lost its accreditation are not yet determined; however, helping the school to achieve "Fully Accredited" status, in which 70 percent of its students pass the SOL test, will be the focus.

A school cannot lose its accreditation until 2006-2007. Beginning with the 2003-2004 school year, no school will be rated "Provisionally Accredited." If the 70 percent passing rate is not achieved, regardless of improvement, the school will be rated "Accredited with Warning." (The exception is 50 percent in Grade 3 for History and Social Science and Science.) A school may be "Accredited with Warning" for no more than three consecutive years. After that time, accreditation will be denied.



As soon as a school receives an “Accredited with Warning” rating, it must develop a Corrective Action Plan to improve student achievement in SOL tests over two years. The plan is developed with parents, teachers, local school administrators, and board members, and shared with the community.

If a school continues to be “Accredited with Warning” during the 2001-2002 school year, it must submit an improvement plan to the Board of Education. A Peer Educator Advisory Group appointed by the Board of Education will evaluate the plan. Schools in this rating must document for their community the efforts being taken to provide instructional intervention and remediation for those students who have not passed the SOL tests.

### **How Can We Help?**

The Virginia Board of Education and the Virginia Department of Education are committed to providing the assistance and resources to support raising student achievement in the Commonwealth. If you have questions, need additional information, or have insights, comments, and experiences to share, please let us know.

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